THE THREE INFANT BAPTISMS

OF

OXFORD, GLASGOW, AND MANCHESTER;

AND

The New Testament Baptism

OF

REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS;

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT BRISTOL.

BY EDWARD WHITE.

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THREE INFANT BAPTISMS

OF

OXFORD, GLASGOW, AND MANCHESTER;

AND

The New Testament Baptism

OF

REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS;

WITH CONSIDERATIONS ON

THEIR RESPECTIVE BEARINGS ON PERSONAL RELIGION AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH.

To which is prefixed,

A BRIEF DEFENCE BOTH OF IMMERSION AND POURING.

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE GALLERY OF THE FINE ARTS ACADEMY, BRISTOL.

BY EDWARD WHITE,

AUTHOR OF FOUR DISCOURSES ON LIFE IN CHRIST.

LONDON:

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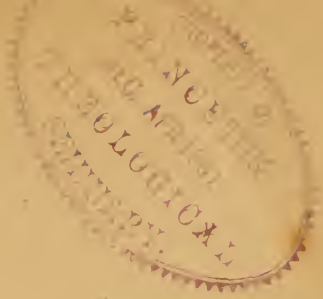
1850.

"IT IS IN THE HIGHEST DEGREE PROBABLE THAT THE PRACTICE OF INFANT BAPTISM WAS UNKNOWN AT THIS PERIOD."

Neander on the Apostolic Church.



PREFACE.

The question of Baptism has in the lapse of ages become entangled with manifold worldly and party interests, in the shape of trust deeds, church and chapel property, ministerial salaries, and the dignity of ecclesiastical corporations; and so vast is the amount of gold and silver that weighs in either scale of the argument, that, from the frailty of human nature, it is difficult for men to handle it in a serious and unprejudiced spirit, notwithstanding the honesty of their general character and intentions. The measure of angry bigotry which prevails in relation to this subject, can be fully estimated by those alone whose inquiries have been specially turned in that direction. Among the defenders of infant baptism this evil spirit of theological animosity exists, not always, yet more frequently, in a latent form; among the Baptist communities, as is the wont of reformers, it is more loudly expressed. Some few of the latter, particularly in the country districts, appear to exult over the baptism of a proselyte more than over a conversion. The occasions of the administration of the sacred rite are

not seldom taken, with singular bad taste and judgment, as opportunities for controversy, and for throwing out bold, exciting challenges to the opponents. Now and then, as recently in Wales, a spirit of baptism seems to break out in a neighbourhood, which might strike an observer as betraying a strong family likeness to the spirit of a gross and vulgar Puseyism. The aim then appears to be to conquer the Independents, rather than to conquer sin: and many are urged to be baptized, who have not perhaps been first sufficiently urged to repentance. In matters of opinion it is well known that we are more likely to be in bondage to ourselves than to any other man. It is a sore trial to sacrifice the dignity of our own judgments, by admitting that we did not start in life in a state of omniscience. It costs most men a severe struggle to abandon an opinion which has been often and earnestly defended. This struggle is rendered doubly severe by the anti-pædobaptist tactics referred to. Ill feeling begets ill feeling. The voice of brotherly correction in righteousness is superseded by the tone of an unscrupulous partizanship, and since both parties are composed of fallen men, a similar manifestation from the adversary generally ensues. True zeal for God, however, is love in action. The genuine love of truth is inseparable from the love of God and man. The love of our own opinions may exist in conjunction with a very sincere dislike of those who oppose them. Until the leaders in such unholy warfare are visited with the sharp rebuke of the masses of moderate men of either opinion, there is but little hope of the useful prosecution of this or any other controversy.

Among persons who are animated by a sectarian spirit, assent to every article of their creed is usually demanded

as the pre-requisite to ministry and communion. Sectarian theology runs upon its own railway. It knows no change of gauge. The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Little, I fear, will it avail an inquirer in the eyes of such to profess conviction of the sole apostolicity of the baptism of believers elder or younger, unless he be also prepared to admit the sole apostolicity and lawfulness of immersion as the mode. For all those learned persons who conscientiously maintain the latter opinion, it behoves us to entertain due sentiments of respect: but it is perfectly unwarrantable to represent the practice and prejudice of the masses of uninstructed members of the Baptist denomination as founded on an adequate and critical conviction. They hold that immersion only is lawful, not because they understand Greek, but because they have been taught that *βαπτίζω* signifies nothing but to *dip*. Men adopt opinions in bundles without much examination. Believers in infant baptism always maintain the mode of sprinkling or pouring; the opponents always and everywhere believe only in immersion.

For my own part, (if a personal explanation in this place may be pardoned,) notwithstanding that Baptism is properly an initiatory sacrament, I have, after much consideration, been baptized; 1st, because it is a command of Him who is made Lord of the universe with infinite authority, and who requires from his ministers that they should "do and teach" His "least commandments;"—2nd, because in all conscientious obedience there is blessedness, and even after many years of religious thought, such an exercise may be rendered exceedingly instructive and consolatory, if it have been previously neglected:—and 3dly, because this was the

strongest possible method of bearing a solemn and public testimony against what I feel constrained to regard as the error of infant baptism, the foundation-stone of the Roman and Anglican theologies. Further, I have been baptized by immersion, not only because I knew of none who would baptize me in any other manner; but also, because I desired to bear witness that this is a Scriptural and the regular ante-nicene mode of "washing with water," as may be seen in the writers of that early age; —because it is very ignorantly and profanely regarded with ridicule by the modern world;—and because, if solemnly, slowly, and, as the Rubric of the Church of England says, "warily" administered, in sufficiently deep water, and without sudden plunging, the rite may be rendered a strikingly impressive image of the extreme defilement of human nature which requires so great a purification, of the death unto sin, and of the resurrection unto life eternal, through the justifying, cleansing mercy of God.

But, at the painful risk of displeasing both denominations of dissenters, by agreeing with both of them, I must here humbly venture to profess the belief, founded upon an attentive perusal of the books of both parties, that the word βαπτίζω signifies to cover with any fluid, either from above or from beneath; and, consequently, that while he who is immersed has, beyond all doubt, received baptism, he also is sufficiently baptized on whom water is copiously sprinkled or poured. In the case of immersion, the image represents burial of the old nature with Christ. In the case of pouring or copious aspersion, the image sets forth, not only the justifying power of the name of Jesus, but also the descent and anointing of the sanctifying and immortalizing Spirit of the living

God. In this manner, as we learn from Cyprian's seventy-fifth letter, the sick and bed-ridden were baptized in the early church; and this martyr-bishop earnestly contends for the completeness of that baptism, and rebukes those who, like our modern Baptist friends, then spoke slightingly of such initiation; quoting such passages also as this: "Behold I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean," &c.* Those who, with a competent knowledge of the facts concerning the scarcity of water at Jerusalem, and the absence of any considerable stream—for Kidron was a filthy drain—are able, without hesitation, to suppose that the thousands of Pentecostal converts were all immersed, are welcome to their faith; but it ought to be remembered, that it is in the highest degree improbable, that in that hot and oriental climate persons would have submitted to baptism in the same standing water in which many other men and women had been baptized. The practice is sufficiently repulsive in a cold country; but it would be intolerable nearer the line. At least, therefore, water for a thousand baths would have been required; and, I confess, it seems much more probable that, since there was *not* "much water there," the Jerusalem baptisms were performed by pouring water on the head. In this manner, as may be seen in 'Bingham's Antiquities,' the early martyrs sometimes baptized their keepers in the prison. Be this, however, as it may, it

* Nec quemquam movere debet quod aspergi vel perfundi videntur ægri cum gratiam dominicam consequuntur, quando scriptura sancta per Ezechielem prophetam loquatur et dicat; *et aspergam super vos aquam puram*, &c. Unde apparet aspersionem quoque aquæ instar salutaris lavacri obtinere, et quando hæc in ecclesia fiunt, ubi sit et accipientis, et dantis fides integra, stare omnia et consummari ac perfici posse majestate Domini et veritate fidei.

would appear that if sickness was of old time, in that deeply mystic antiquity, a sufficient dispensation from immersion, those numerous persons may also be exempted from it in this more northern latitude, and in these less ceremonial days, whom sex, health, age, weak nerves, or timid disposition, might hinder from receiving a spiritual benefit at the time, from so great an excitement and physical shock as that which is undoubtedly occasioned by the submersion of the whole body. Some relaxation in the strict Greek criticism which characterizes the Baptist churches on this word, *βαπτίζω*, would, I feel persuaded, be of infinite service; since, next to the dissenting pædo-baptisms, it would appear that the unconquerable and unconditional demand for immersion in all cases, is the principal buttress of the system of infant-baptismal-regeneration. Baptists are scarcely aware of the horror with which, rightly or wrongly, most persons regard the practice of public immersion.

With respect to the scriptural argument as admitting of both modes, I never yet encountered an advocate of pouring or sprinkling exclusively, who seemed to do justice to the evidence of apostolic immersion afforded by such texts as "buried with him in baptism," &c.; and, on the other hand, I never yet met with a Baptist who appeared to perceive that it is quite inadmissible to regard the "baptism with fire" of the day of pentecost as a dipping into that sacred element, or who seemed disposed to treat with justice the exposition of that baptism offered in the words, "He hath *shed forth* this which ye now see and hear." Such is the wonderful obstinacy of religious convictions!

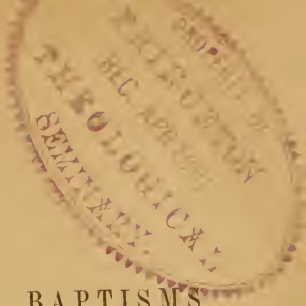
If, however, every passage in the Bible indicated that

immersion was the invariable mode of apostolic baptism, I feel persuaded that the genius of Christianity warrants an adaptation of its outward forms to the circumstances of different climates, persons, and ages. Why do not the defenders of one mode of baptism only "greet one another with a holy kiss?" The apostolic command is sufficiently clear; but it is held that in our country such a mode of salutation would not be accounted other than undesirable, if adopted by all ages and both sexes. I venture to apply something of the same kind of reasoning to the mode of baptism, and should be glad to see an attempt to draw a distinction between the two cases. With those learned persons who contend that to baptize signifies to dip, and nothing but to dip, we have here no concern. They are referred to Dr. Halley's masterly chapter on the subject, in his volume on the Sacraments. The masses of the Baptist people, however, do not understand Greek; and with them the popular persuasion cannot be a matter of enlightened conscience; since they have just as much reason to believe those scholars who tell them that to baptize signifies to cover with water from above or from beneath, as they have to believe those who tell them that it signifies to cover from beneath only, by immersion. A piece of delicate and doubtful Greek criticism is scarcely a fitting basis for a popular Christian denomination.

Some weighty words of Dr. Arnold shall close this preface. "Be of one party to the death, and that is Christ's; but abhor every other; abhor it, that is, as a thing to which to join yourselves;—for every party is mixed up of good and evil, of truth and falsehood; and in joining it, therefore, you join with the one as well as the other. If circumstances should occur which oblige

you practically to act with any one party as the least of two evils, then watch yourselves the more lest the least of two evils should by any means commend itself at last to your mind as a positive good. Join it with a sad and reluctant heart, protesting against its evil, dreading its victory, far more pleased to serve it by suffering than by acting; for it is in Christ's cause only that we can act with heart and soul, as well as patiently and triumphantly suffer. Do this amidst reproach, and suspicion, and cold friendship, and zealous enmity; for this is the portion of those who seek to follow their Master, and Him only. Do it, though your foes be they of your own household; those whom nature, or habit, or choice, had once bound to you most closely. And then you will understand how, even now, there is a daily cross to be taken up by those who seek not to please men, but God: yet you will learn no less, how that cross, meekly and firmly borne, whether it be the cross of men's ill opinion from without, or of our own evil nature struggled against within, is now, as ever, peace, and wisdom, and sanctification, and redemption, through Him who first bore it."—*Sermons* iii. p. 263.

It may be proper to add, that nothing will be found in these pages bearing specially on the theory of Mr. Gorham and his party. So far as they agree with their own church, by admitting an occasional baptismal regeneration of infants, they are answered by the arguments against the doctrine of that church. So far as they agree with the dissenters, the replies to the dissenters will also serve.



THE

THREE INFANT BAPTISMS

OF

OXFORD, GLASGOW, AND MANCHESTER,

ETC.

THE controversy on the nature of the apostolic baptism is one which most persons approach with excessive repugnance. This repugnance arises in some minds from an opinion of the secondary importance of the question at issue; in others from despair of ascertaining the truth in a discussion carried on with voluminous arguments on both sides by able men during many generations; in others again from a deep horror of the practice of immersion, and from a consequent prejudice against any reasonings supposed to be necessarily connected with that practice; and lastly, in others from a dread lest the result of such an investigation should be to sunder the bonds of ancient and cherished ecclesiastical relationships.

None of these reasons however, are sufficient in the judgment of a healthy conscience to excuse a perversion through indifference, of one of the great sacraments of the Christian religion. Baptism is at least as holy as the communion of the Lord's supper; and if a careless reception of the latter was punished in the Corinthian church by the infliction of death, we may presume that, bad as an unwilling error on baptism may be after examination, a total indifference as to the truth, evinced

by a refusal to inquire, is far worse. If the precept, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," was applicable to the distinction between meats and between days, it is surely far more applicable with respect to the sacred ordinances of the church, which is the house and the temple of the living God. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. He that doubteth is damned if he eat, (or baptize) because he eateth not of conviction: for whatsoever is not of conviction is sin." Rom. xiv. 22, 23.

Whatever might have been the original place of baptism in the system of Christianity, the controversy concerning it has practically become one of the very highest importance in subsequent ages. In a world full of corrupt tendencies, an apparently trivial error may prove the germ and element of a vast system of delusion. In consequence of the living unity of truth, a single mistaken opinion is nearly certain to spread the infection of error over a wider surface than was at first occupied by the disease. The more general the principle assumed in an argument, the greater will be the number of special truths or falsehoods to which it leads, according as it is itself a truth or a falsehood. And the history of the sacraments forms a signal illustration of these statements. The miraculous, or rather magical, doctrines on baptism and transubstantiation in the Lord's supper, prevalent in the Roman church, form, as the great Roman Catholic philosopher, Schlegel, asserts,—the foundation of the whole power of the Roman hierarchy—a destroying power which has overshadowed, and still overshadows, the world. There is scarcely a portion or an interest of Christianity unaffected in modern times by the doctrine of the sacraments. The question of baptism is inextricably woven into the web of the doctrine of church membership, and that again into the doctrine of church privileges and church discipline. If, therefore,

there be any importance attaching to the controversy with the Roman Catholic or Anglican hierarchies, the same importance attaches to the true doctrine of baptism. If there be any interest or weight in the question, Who shall be regarded as a member of the church of Christ? an equal collateral interest belongs to the question, Who shall be baptized? And if there be any regard due to the administration of the apostolic laws of church government, the same regard is due to that extension or limitation of baptism which regulates the quality and character of the persons of whom the church is composed. A mind suitably impressed with the obligatoriness of every precept rendered permanently binding by Divine Authority, and with the offensiveness to heaven of human commandments taught as the doctrines of God, will readily admit that error in this department of Christian duty is greatly to be deprecated, whether that error lie with the churches who practise infant baptism, or with those who reject it.

Four distinct systems of baptism are taught in the churches in modern times, each claiming to represent the ordinance instituted by the Son of God. I propose to offer a brief examination of them in succession.

I.

The first is that which prevails in the Lutheran church and the church of England, which attributes a spiritual, regenerating efficacy to the administration of the rite, conditionally upon a worthy reception in the case of adults, unconditionally and absolutely in the case of infants. The gift of the Holy Spirit is conceived to accompany the washing with water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Original sin is supposed to be removed by the ceremony, and its awful consequences of everlasting misery prevented in the future state, so that those who have been baptized,

and die in infancy, are "undoubtedly saved," while a dark cloud rests upon the prospects of those who have not enjoyed the benefit of the saving ordinance. The baptism of infants under this theory is made to rest upon a threefold argument. 1st. The commission to "teach all nations, baptizing them," is alleged to comprehend within its intention all classes, from the earliest infancy to the hoariest age. 2nd. The nature of the benefit to be bestowed, regenerating grace, points out infants as among the most suitable recipients, since in them there can be no obstacle through personal transgression to a worthy reception. And, 3rdly, it is maintained that the voices of antiquity are unanimous in support of the doctrine of the remission of sin and gift of the Spirit in baptism, and in defence of the corresponding administration of the rite to infants as well as persons of adult age.

We at once admit that whatever evidence there is in the writings of the early Christians in favour of infant baptism, and there is not a little from the end of the second century downwards, there is precisely the same amount of evidence in favour of the doctrine of the spiritual regeneration of infants thereby. It is a manifest violence to deny this, which is one of the plainest facts in ecclesiastical history. It is a fact, on the strength of which all the great church writers of England, down to the days of Waterland and Bishop Bethell, have securely depended against their puritan opponents. I do not think a single passage can be adduced in defence of infant baptism in which the reason alleged for the administration is any other than a design to make them partakers of the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Thus in the Epistles of Cyprian, bishop and martyr in the middle of the third century, a man well qualified to represent the opinions of the previous generation, and of his contemporaries, we find him reprehending a presbyter, who desired to postpone the

baptism of infants to the eighth day, in conformity with the law of circumcision, and at great length urging the administration as soon after the birth as possible, on the very ground that spiritual circumcision should not be delayed, but that every human being should be admitted as speedily as possible to the grace of Christ, the remission of original sin, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. *Epist.* 58. Such is the uniform voice of the ancient church writers who have descended to our times. There is not one of them, apparently, who would not have been shocked at the idea of a baptism by water unaccompanied by the gift of the Spirit, and this equally in the case of infants and adults. In the council of eighty-seven bishops, held at Carthage, under the presidency of Cyprian, heretical baptism was decreed to be no baptism, because it could not be accompanied by the heavenly gift. Heretics, therefore, in coming over to the orthodox church were to be re-baptized.

The nonconformist writers, therefore, who have gladly availed themselves of the testimony of antiquity in favour of infant baptism, have not behaved with perfect candour and their usual truthfulness, when they have suppressed the equally clear evidence of the fact, that this baptism was always and everywhere, so far as appears by the records, administered not as a sign of general truths, not merely as a sign of admission into the church of the covenant, much less as the simple mark of a catechumen, or person to be instructed in Christianity, but always, and without any reservation or hypothesis, as an effectual sacrament for the remission of original sin, and the communication of regenerating grace. The dissenting writers in favour of infant baptism may safely be challenged by their high church adversaries to produce a tittle of evidence from the early church in favour of any other description of infant baptism.

Strong, however, as the high church theory of bap-

tism is in the defence of a most venerable antiquity and catholic orthodoxy, from the second century downwards, it is opposed in all its parts and proportions to the authority of Scripture, and must be regarded as the production of that "mystery of iniquity," which already wrought even in the days of the apostles, and was the almost inevitable growth of an age signally ignorant of the sacred writings, and rife with the spirit of priestcraft, superstition, and apostacy. Men are deceived by the glory of the martyrs as to the true character of the second century in its theological aspect; and never will the Bible regain its due supremacy until we have learned that Justin, Tatian, Theophilus, Clement, Irenæus, Tertullian, and Minutius Felix, were most unworthy successors of Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, Luke, and James.

For, in the first place, although it is said, that "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," it is nowhere said that he who is baptized is always at the same time born of the Spirit. That which our Lord affirms is that baptism by water is necessary, and that baptism by the Spirit is necessary; but he does not in any manner connect the two together, so as to imply that the regenerating baptism of the Spirit takes place at or in the baptism by water. On the contrary, the whole current of the New Testament shows that spiritual baptism or regeneration should precede the water baptism. It was after Cornelius and his company believed through grace, and even after they had received the miraculous effusion of the wonder-working Spirit, that Peter said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" On Roman or Anglican principles the reply would have been obvious and pertinent. Let all men forbid it! for why should they be made a second time regenerate in

baptism who have already received regenerating grace, as is evident by their faith and piety, and by the testimony borne of God by the descent of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The apostle Paul again openly repudiates the doctrine of sacramental efficacy in baptism, when he says in his first epistle to the Corinthians, chap. i., "I thank God I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius, lest any should say that I baptized in mine own name." "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." If the grace of the regenerating Spirit were to be conveyed in baptism, surely St. Paul should rather have lamented that he had conferred the heavenly gift upon so few of the Corinthians. Little right had he to say, "I have begotten you through the gospel." Neither is there any ground for the pretence that our Lord in his conversation with Nicodemus, John iii., intimated the necessity of baptism for infant salvation, when he says, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God;" for it might just as reasonably be argued, that because elsewhere, Mark xvi. 16, he conjoins belief and baptism as essential to salvation, he intimates thereby that infants cannot be saved unless they believe and are baptized; which is impossible. There is as much mention of, or reference to, infants in the one case as in the other; that is, there is no mention or reference at all; and therefore it is exactly as unjustifiable to refer our Saviour's statement on birth by water and the Spirit to infants, as it would be to refer to them his statement on belief and baptism as necessary to salvation.

If, however, we are to believe that the hierarchies of Rome and England possess the enviable power of effecting spiritual regeneration in infant baptism, it seems to be a reasonable and by no means presumptuous inquiry, Are there any clear, indisputable signs that so mighty and blessed a change has been wrought upon the natures

of the baptized? Have they "passed from death unto life," and yet are there no external indications of the fact afforded in the subsequent development of the character? If the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, purity, integrity, devotion, assuredly the bulk of the populations asserted to have been regenerated in infancy give no evidence in their conduct of having been the subjects of the transforming agency. Is this change transient in its results, so that the grace of the Spirit evaporates in early childhood, like the baptismal water from the forehead of the babe? Is it credible that the God of mercy would bestow the highest of all gifts in the earliest infancy, and withdraw it, or permit the heavenly grace to be totally expelled by victorious corruption, just at that period of childhood and youth when the presence of the Holy Spirit would have been of the most signal advantage in furnishing ability for a conquest over sin? Or, if it be a permanent change of nature abiding through following years, how is it that there are not universally some external signs in the character of that new birth and new creation? Is it to be believed that all our ploughmen and vine-dressers, young men and maidens, are spiritually regenerate; that they have received, as the bishop tells them when they flock to confirmation, "the Holy Ghost and forgiveness of all their sins;" and yet that it is not discoverable, by their spirit and deportment, that they have been "made partakers of a divine nature?" Assuredly, we repeat, there are no such signs following. Unbaptized children and youth stand on the same level, as to their morals and religion, with the baptized. No mortal eye could distinguish the two classes. Infant baptism is not followed by the evidences of divine grace; and no reflecting Christian, blessed in after years with a spirit of piety, would think of attributing its possession to regenerating mercy received at the font. We seem to

be warranted, therefore, in regarding the general absence of sanctifying results as the consequence of baptism, as a conclusive proof that no such spiritual change as is imagined accompanies the administration of the rite.

The practical tendency, however, of the Roman and Anglican doctrine is to accustom all the baptized to consider themselves as Christians, as new creatures, as requiring, indeed, subsequent additions of grace, yet not as requiring that fundamental revolution of nature and relation which is described in Scripture as the second birth. If, then, spiritual regeneration was not effected when supposed, the influence of this doctrine must needs be immensely disastrous. It closes the ears of its votaries to all those warnings of Scripture which represent a new, inward creation as indispensable to salvation; it fosters in wicked men the destructive error that they are, in some effectual sense, "the children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven;" and encourages the fatal opinion that there may be some other valid foundation for hope than a manifest production of the fruits of a living faith and love. It confounds together all the baptized inhabitants of a parish, from the saint to the debauchee, as equally regenerate persons; it altogether prevents conformity to the ecclesiastical laws of the apostles of Christ; and it inevitably leads to a general acknowledgment of worldly virtues as Christian graces: thus lowering the entire supernatural system of spiritual religion to a level which suits the carnality of a territorial church. These are heavy charges, indeed; but, if they were preferred in language of rebuke and condemnation corresponding to the sins of soul-destruction which they imply, the facts in evidence would abundantly warrant its employment.

It is sometimes said, in extenuation, by the advocates of the baptismal regeneration of infants, that the church doctrine of *renewal* is its proper supplement, and effec-

tually precludes the danger of injury to souls. The term renewal, in ecclesiastical language, does not signify that which the dissenters intend by it, a radical and final change of heart; but it stands for the idea of a subsequent infusion of grace after baptism, such as may be obtained by confirmation, by the sacrament of the supper, by public preaching, or by private prayer; a supply of grace which renews the state of acceptance and holiness into which baptism had introduced the soul. This grace of renewal is sometimes called conversion by church writers, and, consequently, we may hear from the teachers of baptismal regeneration occasional discourses in which their hearers are exhorted to be converted, to repent, to turn to God, and the like. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that they understood by such renewal a change so great as that which is referred to in our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. They rather intend that which we should designate a revival of religion after declension; and this revival may be realized in very various degrees, being in the much larger proportion of cases no revival of spiritual religion at all, for this reason, that the subjects of the renewal never were truly "made regenerate in baptism," or on any other occasion.

The argument, then, against the theory of the baptismal regeneration of infants is brief, and easy to be understood. 1. The theory rests upon the more general doctrine of the communication of the grace of regeneration by the Spirit in baptism, whether to infants or adults; and this doctrine, however it may be sanctioned by the corrupt and ignorant churchmen of the second and third centuries, is explicitly disclaimed by the apostles Peter and Paul; by the first in his address at the baptism of Cornelius; by the second in his observation on the baptism of the Corinthians. And, secondly, there is no evidence in the character of the children bap-

tized in the churches of Rome and England, that any such change of nature as that pretended by the advocates of baptismal regeneration has been effected by the administration of the rite. The effects of the new birth unto righteousness must be answerable to the greatness of the change, and it is impossible to regard the corrupt and degraded populations of Europe as having been, in any sense, "made partakers of the Holy Ghost."

II.

In proceeding to examine the theories of the nonconformist churches on baptism, we are surprised to find, on the one hand, a perfect unanimity in the rejection of the doctrine of sacramental grace held by the Church of England, and vainly mutilated by the Gorham party; and, on the other, differences among themselves on the nature and results of baptism, which reach down to the very foundation of the ordinance. The Congregational or Independent body is generally distinguished from other similar church polities by its maintenance of the practice of infant baptism; but it is not sufficiently known that two distinct opinions on this subject prevail in those churches—opinions on the nature and grounds of baptism so distinct and different as to offer a far more reasonable cause for ecclesiastical separation than has sometimes been furnished in the history of Christian denominations. That no such division occurs, I can attribute only to the faintness of zeal with which each party holds its opinion, or else to that carelessness with respect to theological truth which is always a characteristic of old established religious communities in a luxurious age. Those amongst us who are more anxious for the unity and strength of the Independent party than for the prosecution of secondary religious controversies, seem conscientiously to endeavour, by silence, or by ingenious palliations, to diminish the apparent breadth of the dif-

ferences existing among the churches; but it is not difficult to show, that although infant baptism is practised universally by the Congregational body, it is practised by two different parties, on two theories so opposite as to constitute two distinct and different sacraments; I refer to the theories of which Dr. Wardlaw and Dr. Halley are well-known as respectively the ablest defenders. We shall now offer a statement, first, of the theory of Dr. Wardlaw; secondly, of the objections made thereto by the party of Dr. Halley; and, thirdly, of the theory maintained by the latter.

1. Dr. Wardlaw (with whom agree probably more than half of the Congregational ministers of England and Scotland, and all the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales,) coincides with all Catholic antiquity, and with the Church of England in regarding baptism as *the sign of admission into the church*, or "general fellowship of the gospel." He urges in defence of this view of the nature of baptism, those numerous passages in the New Testament in which it is said that "believers were baptized," and in which baptism is spoken of as a "putting on of Christ." Gal. iii. 27.

No mark of admission into the church appears in the New Testament except baptism. Those who were baptized on the day of Pentecost, continued together in the apostles' fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers, and this body is immediately after referred to as "the church of Jerusalem." Acts viii. 1. If then baptism be the sign of admission into the church in the case of believers, it must be also the sign of admission in the case of their households, including young children and infants; for we cannot conceive that apostolic baptism conferred church membership in the first instance, but did not confer it in the second. But it is important to observe that Dr. Wardlaw contends that baptism introduces only into the fellowship of the

universal church, and does not qualify for communion with any local assembly or church of Christians, unless it be accompanied with other recommendations,—membership of the church catholic being regarded by this party as something different from, and apparently less honourable than, membership in any particular society. This distinction effectually precludes the baptized children of believers from claiming admission to the communion of the Lord's supper when they attain years of understanding, on the ground of their baptism in infancy. They require, in the dissenting phrase, to be again *admitted into the church*, that is, into communion with some local church, for, according to Dr. Wardlaw's party, they were admitted by their baptism into the communion of the church catholic.

Dr. Wardlaw bases his defence of the practice of infant baptism upon a view of the family principle of humanity, and on an interpretation of the covenant which God made with Abraham and with his seed after him. Abraham was commanded to circumcise his household, who were thereby introduced into the visible church. The children, and even infants, shared in this blessing, and the eighth day was fixed as the time for their reception of the holy sign. The abolition of the Mosaic system leaves unrepealed the more ancient covenant. Circumcision was not of Moses, but of the fathers. Believing Gentiles are now grafted into the stock of Abraham, are Jews in the sight of God, and are Abraham's seed. Consequently they enjoy the privilege of Jews, that of introducing their children in infancy into the church. Baptism has taken the place of circumcision. The sign is changed, but the thing signified remains. God has adopted the family principle as the foundation of the communion of the Christian church. It is evident that this system would speedily absorb the whole of the population into the church, if

the right of baptism were acknowledged to belong to a third generation, so that the grandchild of a saint might be received into the catholic church. Dr. Wardlaw therefore restricts the right of baptism to the immediate descendants, the sons and daughters, of a true, or at least a professed Christian, a member of some local community constituted on stricter principles than the "general fellowship" of the saints. None but the seed of believers are to be baptized, and those only of the first generation. What scriptures are alleged for this extraordinary piece of legislation, I have never understood. It is certain that in Judaism, no child was circumcised on account of his parent, but on account of descent from Abraham, and the privilege descended through all generations. Dr. Wardlaw, however, and the great party whose opinion we are describing, consider it to be a most dangerous error to baptize indiscriminately the children of believers and unbelievers, of those who profess and call themselves Christians, and of those who do not: since infant baptism is intended to recognize an inheritance of membership with the church of Christ, which belongs alone to the children of the godly. It is somewhat difficult to say what profit there is of infant baptism in the estimation of Dr. Wardlaw. It is most strenuously denied to convey any spiritual grace of regeneration to the child. It is denied that it washes out the stain of original sin. It is denied that it in any manner improves the eternal prospects of the recipient in case of early death, since the dissenters do not hold generally with the Church of England, that infants are born, in consequence of original sin, liable to endless misery, "God's wrath and damnation;" but that the atonement of Christ is available for all infants dying in early years, baptized or unbaptized. It is denied that the baptism of a believer's child entitles him to an hereditary right of participation in the holy

communion, or indeed to any right of membership, as the election of church officers, in the local religious communion to which one or both parents belong. Every privilege which was the hereditary right of the Jewish child circumcised in infancy, is denied to the baptized infant of a believer, unless he afterward afford evidence of personal conversion. The baptism of an adult, not previously baptized, would be regarded by this section of the dissenters as a sign of God's pardoning grace to himself on the supposition of the sincerity of his repentance and faith; it would be regarded as a sign of profession of such repentance and faith on his own part; it would be regarded as a sign of his admission into the "general fellowship of Christians," and also as the sign of his admission into some local community. But the baptism of a believer's child is considered to be an act rather for the benefit of the parent than of itself; as an educational institute; as a dedication of the child to God, setting it apart as a holy thing, to be brought up in the circle of the catholic church, and on some future day to be "admitted into the church" again for the privilege of communion, but not until signs of true piety appear. By some of the most intelligent of this party it is held that the children of believers are to be "sanctified from the womb," that they never ought to need conversion, that proper religious education would render all the baptized suitable communicants in early life at the table of the Lord, and fitting participants in the honours and privileges of membership with local communities. One would imagine, however, that the holders of this opinion were not acquainted with any believers, destitute of the rare gift of training up children religiously; one would imagine that they had never seen any, except piously disposed children in religious families; one would imagine that they had closed their eyes to the fact, that one of the most uncommon

things in this world is the possession of real piety from early childhood and upwards. It is happily true, that vast multitudes of persons hopefully pious, are the children of pious parents, and owe much of their religion to the sanctified influence of their education; but it is also notoriously true, that if there are any persons in the world callous to spiritual impressions, and resolutely opposed to spiritual religion, it is that immense multitude who have enjoyed the advantages of early Christian instruction, and resisted it. Yet all of these are to be trained up from childhood in the idea that they are Christians; and this by dissenters, who exclaim against a territorial establishment of Christianity!

2. The objections made by the other party in the Congregational body to the preceding views of holy baptism are neither few nor small. In urgent opposition to the theory of Dr. Wardlaw, it is contended by Dr. Halley and many of the English Independents, in the first place, that the church of Christ is intended to be an association composed not of saints merely in name, but in reality; that the object of its institution was obviously to afford those benefits which sympathy amongst the like-minded is calculated to bestow, and that, therefore, the very object of the institution is defeated when the church is made the resort of a miscellaneous multitude, introduced into it by the right of a carnal inheritance. A spiritual discipline with respect to offenders is commanded in the pages of inspiration, 1 Cor. vi., and this discipline is impracticable except in a spiritual community. The spirituality of the church is certain to be destroyed in a short space of time, if hereditary descent become the method of admission within its boundaries.

Secondly. It is argued by Dr. Halley, and with unanswerable force in my judgment, that the distinction between fitness for communion with the church catholic,

and with a local church, set up by the opposite party of the Congregationalists, is absurd, mischievous, and altogether destructive of the foundations of nonconformity. "If baptism," says Dr. Halley, "does not constitute a person a member of a separate church, it cannot introduce him into that great aggregate of all the visible churches." And on the other hand, if the child of a believer be fitted to become by inheritance a member of the universal church, doubtless he is fit for local communion. Else we shall be obliged to admit the statement that, although he is qualified for the communion of all Christians, he is not qualified for the communion of any certain few. But if he be fitted for local church fellowship or catholic communion through hereditary right, because he is the seed of a son of Abraham by faith; then undoubtedly, by the same argument, he is entitled to the enjoyment of all church privileges. The circumcised Jew possessed a right to the communion of the passover, and a baptized Gentile must possess an equivalent right to the communion of the Lord's Supper. Each may be excommunicated for sin, but the antecedent right to the privileges of church membership must be hereditary in both cases. The churches of England and Rome, regarding infant baptism as an introduction into the visible church, consistently follow up hereditary baptism by hereditary communion. The baptized child is heir to all church rights. This, however, is what Dr. Wardlaw and those who agree with him, will by no means concede to the children of pious parents. They are baptized and considered as members of the church catholic, yet are practically treated as they grow in years, as being without the pale of the "sacramental host." "Here," say the opponents, "is not only the grossest inconsistency, the most manifest violence done to the supposed argument from the Abrahamic covenant, but a serious offence is offered to the

universal communion of saints, as if membership with that great company of the faithful were a far less honourable privilege than membership with some puny band of local religionists." The reason of the prevailing system is easily discernible. If all the baptized households of believers were to be regarded as members in full communion with the local churches, there would be an immediate end to those principles of holy fellowship on which Congregational societies are professedly based, and which are enjoined by the New Testament.

Thirdly. It is urged by Dr. Halley, and by that great body of dissenters who agree with him, that the children of believers have no better title to church membership than any other children or households. "Is there," asks Dr. Halley, "any difference in the privileges, the state, or the character of those learners whom Dr. Wardlaw baptizes, and those learners whom he does not? *We know of none.* They are taught the same truths. They are to be received into the fellowship of the [local] church on the same terms. They are equally invited, warned, and encouraged. They are addressed by the gospel as sustaining the same character,—accepted in the same proposals of grace, and, if they do not believe, condemned without respect of persons. There seems in their character and position, no ground for so great a distinction, as is implied in baptizing some, and not baptizing others, who are equally 'in training for the full fellowship of the people of God.' Dr. Wardlaw nowhere notices a single blessing, which, being imparted to the children of believers, is denied to other children under religious instruction." * In a word, it is the opinion of this party that God loves all children equally, that Christ died for them all, that their safety in case of early death does not, in any instance, depend upon church membership, and that the ground of the admis-

* Halley on Baptism, p. 127.

sion to church membership of any person being the member of a believer's household, should be not any imagined hereditary relation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but personal faith in Christ, and personal repentance and piety.

It might be perhaps supposed, that Dr. Halley, clearly perceiving the untenable nature of the old Puritan argument for infant baptism, which restricts its administration to the children of believers; which regards them as thereby admitted into the catholic church, yet excludes them from all the privileges of that communion; would, in consequence, abandon the defence of infant baptism altogether, and maintain the restriction of the rite exclusively to those, whether of elder or younger years, who can make for themselves a credible profession of faith, and thus establish a claim to church membership. Nothing of the kind, however, has occurred. Those of the Congregational persuasion, who are convinced that Dr. Owen's and Dr. Wardlaw's argument is built on a quicksand, and not less pernicious in its influence than fallacious in its reasoning, have fallen back, in order to maintain the practice of infant baptism, upon one of the most remarkable inventions recorded in the annals of modern theology. They have started the notion, not only in opposition to the party Dr. Wardlaw, but in opposition to the voice of all churches and all ages—that baptism is "the designation of the catechumens, *not the symbol of the members of the Christian church.*" Baptism henceforth is no longer to be regarded as a sign of church membership, as the work of a Christian, or as a seal of righteousness, but simply as a visible indication that the person baptized is to be instructed in the knowledge of Christianity. Accordingly, Dr. Halley advocates and practises the baptism of all persons and of all infants and children indiscriminately, whose connections render it in any way probable that they will become learners of the truths of the gospel. By baptism

they are not in any manner received into the communion of the church catholic or local, but simply pointed out as the objects of redeeming mercy, and the proper subjects of religious instruction. Dr. H. takes his stand upon the commission given, "to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them," and since he understands the term disciples to signify *learners*, excluding any idea of practical obedience, he proceeds to maintain that wherever there is a learner there is a person to be baptized. Every person whose sentiment on holy baptism has been in any measure formed from a knowledge of the lofty conceptions of the sacredness of the ordinance prevalent in the first ages of the church, and of the unwavering uniformity with which baptism was then and ever afterwards considered as the sign of admission into the divine fellowship of the faithful, will not easily resist the temptation to exclaim loudly against this dissenting novelty, as something approaching very nearly to a profanation of the sacrament. The undoubted piety, however, of many who defend it, requires that such exclamations give way to argument derived from the scripture. The rejoinders of Dr. Wardlaw furnish an abundant reply to this part of his assailant's theory: for it has been the fate of these honoured men and eminent writers to destroy completely each other's baptismal system. They seem to have been raised up as if for the very purpose of demonstrating to the Congregational body, who generally refuse to listen to the writers of a rival sect, that neither of the schemes of infant baptism which prevail in their churches will endure examination.

The one fatal objection taken to the theory of Dr. Halley on the nature of baptism is, that it is impossible to reconcile it with the language of the New Testament. The terms of the Commission, if truly ambiguous (which many competent persons doubt) must be interpreted by

the aid of the other scriptures of the New Testament. We must learn from other testimonies whether the persons whom Christ commanded the apostles to baptize were the nations at large, or disciples only, in the sense of professedly obedient believers, among the nations. Dr. Halley is obliged by his theory to maintain that every instance of baptism met with in the apostolic history is the case of a "learner" of the doctrine of Christ, not the case of a professed believer, as such, and not the case of a person introduced thereby into the fellowship of the church universal or local. The very first example of baptism occurring in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, seems to offer evidence sufficient to explode the new doctrine—that "baptism is not the symbol of the members of the Christian church." At the close of Peter's address on the day of Pentecost, the assembled multitude exclaimed, "Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and *be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, *for the remission of sins*, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise [of the Holy Ghost, just before cited from the prophet Joel, 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,' &c.] is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized;* and the same day there were *added unto them* about three thousand souls. And *they* continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need. And they, continuing daily in the temple with one accord, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their

meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." Acts ii. 37—47. Every expression in this passage appears to offer a decisive proof that the three thousand were baptized, not in the character simply of learners of Christianity, but as believing disciples; that they were not baptized as catechumens, but as members of the church, being thereby introduced into full communion with the "apostles and their company." 1. The exhortation to be baptized was preceded, not by a recommendation to become learners of the doctrine, but by a demand for repentance. "Repent, and be baptized." On Dr. Halley's theory it should rather have been, "Be baptized as learners, and then repent." Peter exhorted no man to be baptized who did not first profess repentance and faith in the "name of Jesus Christ." 2. The baptism proposed was "for the remission of sins." This cannot now be well understood, and could not on the day of Pentecost be well understood, in any other sense than that baptism was to be administered to the recipient as a sign of pardon for the past, if he truly repented and truly believed. A "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" was not exactly the rite to be administered to half-careless auditors, much less to their unconscious infant offspring. Language such as that used by Peter concerning baptism, if addressed to a miscellaneous crowd of impenitent persons, exhorted to be baptized in that character, could have been productive of nothing but the most dangerous self-delusion on the part of the recipients. 3. The "promise of the Holy Ghost," made to the "baptized," is another indication that the baptized persons were supposed to be penitent and believers. Assuredly the gift of the Holy Spirit was restricted to the church. "On my *servants* and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit," Acts ii. 18. No promise was made of conferring

the Holy Ghost on a mixed crowd of unconverted catechumens, simply occupied in "learning" Christianity. Those who received the promised gift received it as believers. "These signs shall follow them that believe," Mark xvi. 17. But here it is promised to the baptized. Therefore the baptized were believers and professed penitents. Baptism was the sign of their admission into the family of God. 4. Every subsequent indication points to the same conclusion. "Then *they that gladly received his word* were baptized." What was the *word* which they received? It was not some abstract speculation, but the practical message of the gospel. "Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Those who gladly received this word must have been, in the main, true penitents, and must all have been professed believers, and professed servants of God, and, as such, suitable members for the communion of the church. Of whom can the church consist, if not of such? 5. The persons thus baptized were "added" to them. Added, to whom? Clearly to the company of the apostles, to the one hundred and twenty who met in the upper room, the nucleus of the catholic church. Are Dr. Halley's baptized "catechumens" *added* to the Christians in Manchester? Assuredly not. But the three thousand baptized on the feast of pentecost *were* added to the apostolic church. 6. When thus "baptized" and "added," they gave every indication of being something better than speculative "learners" of Christianity "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine *and fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." And so potent was the influence of divine grace upon their souls that, being freed from the burden of guilt by "the remission of sins," they overflowed in love one toward another, and "parted their possessions and goods to all men, as every man had need. They con-

tinued daily in the temple, and, breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." If baptism were not intended to be regarded as the sign of admission into the church, and as the proper privilege only of those who profess repentance and faith, it seems difficult to imagine a narrative, placed in the forefront of the apostolic history, better calculated to deceive all subsequent generations of mankind. But, indeed, the statements of the apostles, not less than every recorded example of baptism in the Scripture, are in entire conformity with the narrative of the day of pentecost. St. Paul says, Romans vi. 3, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Here baptism is spoken of as the rite by which Christians are ceremonially incorporated into Christ. By baptism they become one with him in death, in order that they may become one with him in the new, divine, and immortal life unto God. In no sense could a mere learner of Christianity be spoken of as having been "baptized into Christ." This is language appropriate only to professed penitents and believers.

Again, the same apostle, addressing the Galatians, chap. iii. 26, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. *For* as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, *have put on Christ.* There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Here baptism is spoken of as the sign of *union with Christ*, to "as many" as have received it. They have "put on Christ." They are "Abraham's seed," "children of

God by faith," and "heirs according to the promise." Nothing, I venture to suppose, except the blinding influence of a false theory, could induce candid interpreters to look upon the baptism referred to in this passage as a baptism which, like a wide rain, should fall indiscriminately upon all the "learners" of Christianity which a country could supply, a race of catechumens so numerous as to include multitudes of unbelievers, of impenitent formalists, and all their households and children.

Two examples of baptism in the Acts of the Apostles are equally fatal to Dr. Halley's system. When Cornelius and his household had believed the Gospel, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, Peter said, "Can any man *forbid* water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Acts x. 44. If Peter had understood baptism to be merely a sign that such and such a person is to become a learner of Christianity, a catechumen, whence could the idea have arisen in his mind that possibly some might "*forbid* water, that these should not be baptized?" The supposition is proof that Peter and every one else regarded the baptism of a Gentile as equivalent to his reception into the Christian catholic church, the true church of God's Israelites, and to such reception there might be raised Jewish objections; which, however, Peter overcame by the consideration that since God had not forbidden the descent of the Spirit, in evidence of the union of Cornelius with Christ, it did not become any man to forbid the water of baptism, as the public sign of the centurion's incorporation with Christ in the visible church of his members.

The baptism of St. Paul himself is narrated in such terms as to convey the impression that the rite was intended only for the professors of a practical repentance

and faith. Ananias of Damascus addressed him as follows: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Acts xxii. 16. According to Dr. Halley, every baptism in the New Testament is administered as to a catechumen, and by no means as to a believer and professed penitent. Was not then the language used by Ananias of a very dangerous tendency? If baptism be in any sense the washing away of sin, or the sign of it, and yet is to be administered to promiscuous crowds of learners and their children, does not Ananias lay a solid foundation for something very much like the doctrines of Rome and Oxford? But the case is clear. Paul was baptized as a believer, not as a catechumen. He was baptized as a stricken penitent, not as a learner. He was by baptism received into the church, and consecrated as an apostle of the living God. And the result of the whole is, that our beloved brethren, in their zeal for infant baptism, have done grievous violence to the scripture, and to the sacredness of baptism, and to the authority of all the churches of God in old times, in their attempt to remove the ancient landmarks, and to convert that which was intended to be the holy sign of the adopted child of God, into a vain ceremony, and, we fear, a national sacrilege.

In concluding this brief review of the two theories of baptism promulgated by Drs. Wardlaw and Halley, and adopted by the Congregational churches, we have now further to repeat that these two theories constitute two different sacraments. The rent goes down to the foundations. Whatever reason there is for the separate existence of a "Baptist denomination," there is the same reason for the separate existence of two denominations holding the diverse views which have been described. There is even a much greater difference between the latter, than between the opinions of the Baptist body

and Dr. Wardlaw's; for there is a wider and more important discrepancy between those who assert that baptism is not the sign of introduction to the church, and those who assert that it is, even though both baptize various classes of infants, than between those who agree that baptism is the sign of admission to the church, though differing with respect to the persons who are to be thus baptized and admitted. In the one case there is a difference as to the very nature of a sacrament; in the other only as to its application.

It is not the similarity of two ceremonial acts which constitutes the identity of sacraments or ceremonies, but the similarity of ideas associated with the performance of them. In the cases of coronation-anointing and extreme unction, the action is the same. Consecrated oil is poured out upon the subject by a consecrated person; and in both cases some general idea of divine grace is intended by the sign. But the sacraments, if we may so term the two, are exceedingly different. In the one a king is consecrated, in the other a dying Christian is supposed to be prepared for his departure. Thus also in the baptisms contended for by Dr. Wardlaw and by Dr. Halley, water in each case may be sprinkled or poured upon the person of an infant or adult; but the ideas associated with the performance of the actions are, with the exception of some general reference to divine mercy in the Gospel, as different as can be well supposed. If Dr. Wardlaw can be imagined as occupied at the font in the baptism of an infant on the one side, and Dr. Halley on the other, as representatives of the two parties in the Congregational body, we should see in either case water sprinkled on the child, and we should hear the same words pronounced. But the meaning of the action on the one side of the font would be exactly the opposite of its meaning on the other. In the one case the child would be thereby received into the church,

as a special object of God's favour, because it possesses an hereditary title to church membership, and to a part in the Abrahamic covenant, as the seed of a true believer. In the other the child would be baptized as a fallen descendant of Adam, it may be as the child of an infidel, brought by relations to be trained up in a knowledge of Christian doctrine; it would be baptized simply with a view to point out that when it grew older it would be proper to furnish it with the knowledge of salvation, but the baptism would signify that it was at present excluded from the church of Christ, and that when it grew to maturer years, repentance would be necessary to secure admission within its precincts. The difference in the baptisms is shown by the difference in the classes baptized. The one restricts baptism to believers and their children of the first generation, the other baptizes all nations, and denies that they have received a sign of consecration to the service of God thereby. Surely this is a serious diversity of opinion and practice. It affects the great question of church membership. It is clear that since Dr. Halley regards a personal profession of faith, and a credible profession of repentance, as essential to form a title to fellowship in a New Testament church, he cannot regard as a New Testament church one which acknowledges an hereditary title irrespective of character. It would seem to follow, that half the Congregational churches of England and Scotland would refuse to acknowledge the claim of the other half to be considered as scripturally constituted societies. On the one side we have laxity in baptism conjoined with strictness in church-membership, on the other, restriction in the administration of baptism, conjoined with laxity in the definition of fellowship. In point of fact, however, these opposite parties do not excommunicate each other. The difference of opinion, though written about with occasional vehemence, is

never carried so far as the adoption of any practical measures for the preservation of order and consistency in the government of the churches.

The prejudice against "the Baptists" secures the peace of the Congregational churches under the prevalence of their two confused systems of infant baptism. Most of their trust deeds prescribe adhesion to the doctrine of the Assembly's Catechism, or to that of the declaration of faith of the Congregational Union—both of which favour the ancient puritan theory of Dr. Wardlaw, which regards baptism as a token of church fellowship, and restricts it to believers and their households.* But the churches are by no means particular in their preference in the choice of pastors. And hence, strange to say, it is quite usual for them to follow the accidental opinion of their successive ministers. During one pastoral dynasty it is held that baptism is "the designation of catechumens." Children are baptized indiscriminately, but none are considered as having been thereby introduced into the catholic or visible church. At the end of that period "another king arises," who happens to hold with earnest faith the ancient puritan doctrine maintained by Dr. Wardlaw, and during his ecclesiastical reign it is taught, and apparently held, after more or less of disgust on the part of the unconverted parents of the congregation, that baptism is the sign of admission to the church, and that the children of believers alone are entitled to the sign and the thing signified, in consequence of their connection with Abraham. Indescribable confusion of thought and practice ensues. In some cases the great sacrament of baptism comes to be regarded with general unconcern, perhaps with a contempt with which none would dare to regard the sacrament of the holy communion. In other cases, the parents of the rejected

* See an able article in proof of this by Dr. Campbell, in the *Christian Witness* for August, 1850.

children are annoyed or indignant at the refusal to their offspring of what they had before been taught to regard as their privileges, and some of them angrily move away to a sanctuary where both they and their children will be welcomed and recognized as very good Christians. Meantime, in public, the honour of the "denomination" is sustained. The churches may each undergo a change in their belief on the question whether baptism is a sign of admission to the church, several times in a century: now practically acting on this pastor's opinion, now on that, vibrating and oscillating, first holding the one opinion and then the other, as if they should cast lots what to maintain on the doctrine of the sacrament every ten years in their history. The language *practically* held to candidates for the pastoral chair is this,—"You may be an angel in orthodoxy, a statesman in the power of government, an example as a humble and loving Christian, but unless you are ready to baptize our children, we must decline all relation with you, though you were a Fuller, a Robert Hall, or a Foster, and relinquish the benefits which we might derive from all your endowments. It is indeed of no importance to us what theory on the subject you hold: for what reasons you practise the ceremony. You may hold and teach that baptism is, or is not, the sign of admission to the church, just as you please. You may earnestly defend the puritan doctrine, and baptize only believers and their households, considering them as thereby incorporated with the body of Christ, or you may teach the exact opposite, after the custom of Manchester, and baptize the whole neighbourhood: these are questions in which we take little interest. We have no opinion as a community on the matter, but we demand that for some reason or another you should baptize at least the children of the church, and as many others as may appear good to yourself, or a few. We think it right to maintain the

'denominational' practice against 'the Baptists;' and therefore, it is necessary for you to be committed to one of the theories prevalent amongst us. If the thing cannot be defended by the one set of arguments, perhaps it may be defensible by the other." Now this I apprehend is not a caricature, but a plain representation of fact. Such is the condition of the congregational churches on the question of baptism. If it be denied, I humbly reply by asking, Where is the church that ever stipulated with a new pastor for the maintenance of either of the theories?—Who at the present day can tell which of the twain is the authorized belief of the Congregational Union? Now, for a church to be zealous for a practice in religion, without being at the same time zealous for the reasons of it, seems to be simply a piece of unworthy sectarianism and superstition. Let each church adopt one of the two theories of baptism, Dr. Wardlaw's or Dr. Halley's: let it insist upon conformity to that theory on the part of all who belong to the society: let it demand a conformity to it on the part of each new pastor in succession, for the reasons alleged by the controversialists on either side, and then each church may enjoy the credit of integrity, and whatever honour belongs to the praise of denominational consistency. But for a church to blazon on its flag, "Our pastor must be a baptizer of infants, but little reck we of the particular reasons of it," is to pursue a course that can only expose the Independent churches to the wonder of all impartial theologians in Christendom. If, on the other hand, however, our churches are not prepared to adopt either of the theories or systems of baptism as their own, then let them cease to regard infant baptism as a denominational test. Since they at present hold two theories, let them at least hold three. Let each man be left to follow his convictions, and let the pulpit become as catholic as the communion.

I now conclude this brief survey of the three systems of infant baptism prevalent in Great Britain, by venturing to state the results which have been urged on me by the investigation.

1. The strange and wide discrepancy of opinion between the various schools, as to the application of the argument of the Abrahamic covenant to the case of infant baptism, naturally suggests strong misgivings as to its validity. It is argued by one party, that as circumcision was the right of the Jewish child, and church privileges were hereditary, so must baptism be the right of the believer's child, because he is the seed of a son of Abraham by faith, and of his only. By the other party it is argued, that the blessing of Abraham has come upon all the Gentiles, and that, therefore, baptism may properly be administered to all nations. Now the sole warrant for believing in the application of that covenant to Gentile converts, is found in the writings of Paul; and from this source we seem to learn nothing more than that *believers themselves* are reckoned through union with Christ as Abraham's seed. "If ye be Christ's, then are *ye* Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Gal. iii. 29. This privilege, however, he affirms to be dependent on their "faith," and from such a statement it cannot assuredly be gathered that their natural offspring are partakers with them through hereditary right in church blessings, here or hereafter; if the argument be not good for the world to come, neither does it seem to be valid for the world that now is, and the privileges of the church militant. None will go so far as to say, that any child's *salvation*, if it die early or if it live to maturity, depends upon the faith of the parent; and yet that would be a natural result of the doctrine which derives a right to church fellowship on earth, from a view of the covenant of promise to Abraham, employed as Paul uses it in Gal. iii., with refer-

ence not to temporal but spiritual blessings. There clearly is some point where the privilege of the Gentile converted to Christ ceases, and where the "advantage of the Jew" begins. The Christian believer becomes spiritually a son of Abraham, and an heir of the promise of salvation: but it will not surely be contended that a converted Briton becomes by faith a Jew in this world, and entitled to a portion in Palestine, supposing the command to return to their country should be given to-morrow to the Hebrew nation. Yet if infant baptism have come in the place of infant circumcision, if the believing Gentile have become in all senses a son of Abraham, so that his seed are entitled to all Abrahamic and church privileges, that consequence would inevitably follow; for circumcision was the sign of the covenant, in virtue of which God gave Palestine to Abraham and to his descendants. Faith in Christ, then, does not confer all Jewish privileges upon the Gentile. It does not entitle him to the honours of the natural seed of Abraham. How then can it be maintained that the Gentile introduces his physical descendants into the church in virtue of the Abrahamic covenant? The Abrahamic covenant would confer all church rights if it conferred any rights. It would operate through all generations of a son of Abraham's descendants if it operated through two generations,—consequences from which our infant baptists heartily revolt. The difficulty arises from allowing, in any degree, that the personal spiritual privileges of the believing Gentile, as a son of Abraham, give him a title to transmit those privileges on the totally different principle of natural or carnal descent. It was carnal descent from Abraham that gave a right to circumcision and Jewish church membership; but from this it can never be argued that to be reckoned in the line of his spiritual descendants, confers a similar privilege in the Christian church. Unless, then, a man be prepared to contend

that baptism converts a believing Gentile into a carnal descendant of Abraham, he would seem to be destitute of all reason for contending for a descent of church privileges to his children in the flesh. The "babes in Christ," whom we should seek to introduce into the church, are those both of younger and of elder years, who have been "born again" and "created anew." The Abrahamic covenant may well be regarded, as Dr. Halley regards it, as having a world-wide bearing towards, not believers only, but all the kindreds of the nations, including their offspring, but the seal of righteousness, the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins is to be given exclusively to those of whatever age, who voluntarily embrace the offer of salvation. If one class of infants have a right to baptism under this covenant, then have all infants and households the same right, for they are all alike objects of the gospel redemption: but since baptism is, as Dr. Wardlaw truly asserts, the sign of admission to the church, the practice of baptizing all infants would necessarily end in destroying the distinction between the church and the world. The safety, happiness, and instruction of children in infancy, or very early childhood, do not depend upon communion with the Christian church. Baptism can confer upon them no regeneration: and before they know to refuse the evil and choose the good, they are from infirmity of understanding, incapable of comprehending Christian ideas. If they die in infancy their salvation is secure on other grounds than baptism and church fellowship. If it be not, assuredly baptism and church fellowship cannot save them. After they arrive at years of intelligence and responsibility, they stand before God precisely on the same ground with all other human beings. The piety of parents cannot profit them, and their claim to church membership depends upon personal faith, obedience, and love.

2. The defence of infant baptism is very mainly made to stand upon an argument derived from the fact, that in the New Testament several "households" are asserted to have been baptized. It is conceived that these households may have comprised some children under years of responsibility. A mere conjecture is not solid ground on which to erect so vast a fabric as that of infant baptism—for if the system be allowed, all baptism will for ever after be infant baptism, when once a generation has accepted Christianity. Neander feels entirely satisfied with the common replies to the argument derived from the three household baptisms mentioned in scripture. In each case there is sufficient evidence that the whole party, whether composed of elder or younger persons, were "believers." In the instance of the Philippian jailor, we are told that the apostle spake the word "to all that were in his house;" that "he was baptized, he and all his straightway,"—that he "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Acts xvi. 31. If there be no warrant for thinking that infants or young children were here taken from their beds at dead of night, to hear the gospel, and to "rejoice" with their father, neither is there any evidence that any were baptized. The second instance of household baptism is that of Lydia. There is no proof that she was a married woman, much less that she had infant children. The trade in purple was hers. The house was hers. It is not usual to designate a house or trade as the property of the wife. We learn from the narrative, that the household of Lydia consisted of "brethren," whom the apostle afterwards visited and "comforted"—probably comprising her pious and devout attendants; for she was before a religious woman, and doubtless preferred the services of craftsmen and overseers who were not pagans or ungodly. Thirdly, we read that Paul baptized "the household of Stephanas." Again, there is no evidence that infants or young children were

included. In another place Paul mention this "house" as the "first-fruits of Achaia, who had addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints;" surely not a mark that they were either unconverted, or irreligious young people, or sucklings at the breast. It is wonderful that some of us have not sooner become ashamed of these weak foundations for the practice of infant baptism. But the case is yet stronger. The fact that there *are but three* households mentioned as having been baptized by the apostle would seem fatal to the idea that they practised, as a rule, family baptism. On Dr. Wardlaw's theory not less than on Dr. Halley's, we might have expected to find it recorded, that when thousands were baptized, "multitudes both of men and women," their households, their unconverted inmates and young children were baptized along with them. We find, however, no such record. Nothing appears, except the baptism of "believers." There is no precept for family baptism. There is no example of it, except when it is indicated that the whole family heard, believed, rejoiced. The whole case, methinks, tells against the doctrines of Glasgow and Manchester. If it be alleged that perhaps the baptisms of these tens of thousands of families really occurred, although it is not recorded, it seems sufficient to say, that perhaps also the apostolic church practised infant communion, as did Cyprian's age, as does the Greek church to the present day, though it is not recorded. But this argument from the silence of the scriptures, comes with but a poor grace from the nonconformist opponents of Romanism. When Romanists affirm that the whole of their vast system of superstition is truly of apostolic antiquity, though not very clearly in the scripture, the absence of scriptural evidence is thought to be a sufficient argument in reply. When Congregational churches borrow the Roman device, is the weapon conceived to be sanctified by its employment or employers?

It is next to be observed, that infant baptism is incapable of any defence whatever, except on the much wider principle of household baptism; and this involves certain consequences, when honestly and consistently carried out, which, from their egregious character, serve to evince the unsoundness of the rule and of the argument. If the practice under the covenant of Abraham be the model which we are to follow, admission to the church must be accorded to others besides new-born babes; to the unbelieving wife (since in Christ there is neither male nor female); to the elder unconverted children of a believer, who do not offer a violent refusal to submit to baptism; and even, perhaps, to the servants of the household. It is not, indeed, the custom to introduce these persons into our religious societies when the head of a family is converted; but this is in direct defiance of the pleaded example of the ancient covenant. No principle is alleged in virtue of which infant children are made partakers of the blessing, and elder ungodly children and unbelieving wives and servants are excluded. There is one passage of Scripture commonly, but very erroneously, quoted in defence of infant baptism, which, if applicable, would oblige the baptism of the unbelieving wife, and lay a foundation for her admission to all church privileges:—"And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife (is made holy by the wife), and the unbelieving wife is made holy by the husband: else were your children unclean, but now are they holy." 1 Cor. vii. 13, 14. The words translated "sanctified" and "holy" in these verses are the same in the Greek, except that one is a verbal form, the other an adjective. The "holiness" attributed to the children is precisely the same with the "holiness" attributed to the unbelieving husband or

wife, through their connection in marriage with a believer. If, therefore, there be any argument derivable from the "holiness" of the children in favour of their admission into the church, irrespective of their ages and characters, there is exactly the same argument from the "holiness" of the unbelieving husband or wife in favour of their admission, also, into the congregation of "the saints." Those who are not prepared to admit the latter, must abandon the argument in favour of the former. But, in truth, Paul is not speaking here of spiritual holiness in the high sense of the words, but of that natural and ceremonial "holiness" which is opposed to "uncleanness" in the legal and civil use of the term. The unconverted wife is "sanctified" by the believing husband for the purpose of conjugal society. The difference in religion does not annul the marriage in the sight of God; else the past children of the marriage would be branded with illegitimacy; they would be cast aside as "born of fornication;" they would be "unclean." But now, according to the Divine rule, all such marriages, contracted in an unconverted state with pagans, are good in the sight of God, both for the past and for the future. Therefore, let not the converted party depart on the score of Christianity. Here is nothing bearing on the subject of church fellowship. The question is marriage, and the children are asserted to be holy only as the unbelieving pagan wife is asserted to be holy, that is, they are in God's sight the *legitimate* wife and children of a believer; and the words apply to children of all ages, good and bad, not to infants only.

It is sometimes alleged that, since the family principle was recognized in Judaism as the basis of "church" constitution, so must it have been recognized in Christianity, else the privileges of the ancient dispensation would have been greater than the privileges of the new. This is precisely the argument of those who maintain

the principle of national establishments of religion under Christianity. The Hebrew theocracy embraced the whole nation. The whole nation was the church. Unless the same rule be allowed now, the privileges of Christianity will be less than the privileges of Judaism. Exactly so. And they are less in this respect, that Christianity makes no provision in the church for persons not professedly godly. The law is absolute: "PUT AWAY FROM AMONG YOURSELVES THAT WICKED PERSON," 1 Cor. vi. 13. The New Testament is not designed to be the religion of any except the "spiritual," and these are always a small minority. If, therefore, the privileges of Christianity are less than those of Judaism with respect to the nation, they may be less with respect to the household or family. It is affirmed that Jewish converts would naturally expect that all their households would be received into communion. How so, if, as we are assured on other occasions, baptism introduces us into the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant? These Jewish households had been already introduced into that covenant by circumcision; why should they be introduced into it again? No. The new covenant was founded upon better promises, and established a communion founded on a better principle. Relationship was to be reckoned by spiritual, not by carnal ties. Those who are "born of God" are "brethren;" but natural descent, "birth of blood," could not entitle to the rights of the divine communion. Enlightened Jewish converts (for of these alone we speak, since the unenlightened ones were the fathers of nearly all the corruptions of Christianity) could expect no such thing as that the household principle would be adopted as the basis of church fellowship by the apostles of Him who every where proclaimed himself as the "divider of households." Further, the new rite of baptism demonstrates that the church was a new and different commu-

nion from the synagogue. It is impossible to read Paul's epistles addressed to the churches, and to receive the impression that those churches consisted of a mixed multitude of families, of a vast assemblage of unconverted husbands, wives, and children, with a small minority of believers scattered among them, in virtue of whose faith they were reckoned as Christians. The members of the apostolic churches were all obviously persons who took up the profession of the gospel, knowing that it might cost them their lives. And this being so, the "privilege" of baptism would inevitably become a personal affair.

3. All the examples of baptisms in the New Testament are the baptisms of professed believers. The commission was to baptize believers: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," Mark xvi. 16. Not, he that is baptized as a learner, and then believes. The defence of infant baptism rests only on an inference drawn from the practice under the Abrahamic covenant —an inference which, as we have seen, is full of uncertainty and contradiction when in the hands of its own ablest advocates. The very controversy in the days of Cyprian whether baptism should not be administered on the eighth day, shows that there was no well-authenticated apostolic tradition on the subject; but that the placing of baptism on the same footing as infant circumcision was a novel and a Jewish device. Fifty years before, Tertullian had advised the postponement of it until the children could understand its signification; a matter in which it is, perhaps, much to be wished that Cyprian had followed his master. Tertullian's advice, again, looks as though he knew very well that the growing and general custom was founded on false sacramental ideas, and, in spite of Origen's subsequent assertion, was not apostolic.

Contending, however, as we do, that the family tie is

nowhere exhibited in the New Testament as the bond of ecclesiastical communion, apart from family religion, we cannot avoid perceiving that the family institution is abundantly recognized in Christianity, and that family duties form the principal theatre for the exercise of Christian graces. The instincts and obligations of the parent are all provided for and directed by the religion of Him who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." The practice of infant-baptism may be founded upon either of two of the strongest impulses in humanity—the tendency to magical superstition, or the instinct of paternal love; on a vague faith in the efficacy of a sacrament, or on an earnest desire to commend the beloved child to God. So long as the former tendency lingers in the churches, infant-baptism will be practised in order to ensure the safety of the child; and even those who partially doubt the theory of sacramental efficacy, will, from the power which mystery exercises over the imagination, generally go with the multitude to "do this evil thing." With respect to such motives, we can only wish that an increase of intelligence may dawn upon the public mind, revealing the truth that the eternal safety of children does not depend upon the sprinkling of a few drops of water, but upon the shedding of the blood of Christ, who was once himself a babe, "wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger."

The desire to "dedicate" a new-born child to God Most High is a far more laudable motive in the practice of infant baptism. Let it, however, be understood what this dedication amounts to. The child is already an object of God's love. Baptism cannot make a child an object of redeeming mercy; for all children are already such objects. Dedication cannot ensure its safety in case of early death; for we may hope that this safety is provided for already. Dedication cannot re-

move the taint of original sin; for that is unremovable except by death: and all mankind will die. Dedication cannot ensure God's favour for the child if, when it come to years of intelligence, it display a "hard and impenitent heart." What, then, may it signify? Dedication may signify solemn prayer to God, through Christ, for the child's life, health, and sanctification by the Spirit, as its mind and faculties expand: prayer which may or may not be answered. It may signify a solemn promise before God to devote the best parental energies to its Christian training. Or, it may signify a solemn setting apart for God's service and ministry: a most rash and dangerous proceeding under the present economy. Hannah might devote Samuel to the service of a "worldly sanctuary;" but no Christian parents can ensure the piety of their offspring, or their fitness to discharge the spiritual services of the Christian dispensation.

But, whatever fitness there may be, and there seems to be much fitness, in the "dedication" of infants to God, in bringing them to Christ, "*that he may put his hands upon them, and pray for them*," it seems that such dedication does not at all answer to the idea of the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Christ did not baptize the children thus brought to him. He prayed for them, and blessed them. In the Church of England, infant baptism is conjoined with an awful delusion as to spiritual regeneration. Among dissenters it answers no purpose which may not be answered equally well without it. A dedicated child is the same whether baptized or unbaptized. The parents' obligations are to be learned from conscience and the Bible: and, if not learned thence, baptism will not teach them. In case of early death, the baptism avails neither parent nor child; not the parent, for the age of education has not been reached; not the child, for it was unconscious

under the ceremony, and its salvation is dependent neither on dedication nor baptism.

We are conducted to the same conclusion if we compare the value of the force of infant baptism as an educational or spiritual motive, with that of baptism on an intelligent profession. If a baptized child live to maturity—its parents who witnessed the rite may have died—the persons who were principally to be instructed by the ceremony. If they live to conduct the education of the child, they must be strangely constituted if they will train their offspring for God, only, or chiefly, because it was baptized. The educational influence of infant baptism on the minds of parents is, after all, infinitessimally small. Those who are pious, train up their families as well as they are able in the knowledge and practice of truth, whether they have been baptized or not in infancy. And those who are destitute of religion are never moved by the "christening" of their households, to teach them the good ways of the Lord.

The same thing is true with regard to the subjects themselves. Notwithstanding the allegations of a few enthusiastic defenders of pædo-baptism, as to the benefit which they suppose themselves to have derived from it, I apprehend, that of all the influences which act upon us in forming the character, the fact that we were baptized in infancy is the faintest. Circumcision left a permanent mark upon the subject of it, which might remind him of his privileges and obligations. Infant baptism leaves no such mark, either on the body or on the memory. It can be known to the baptized only as a traditionary fact in the family history. If, however, it exercise any influence at all, that influence is likely to be of a pernicious tendency, encouraging the vague idea that there is some other way of becoming a Christian than by personal thought upon Christian truth, and personal obedience to it. Not to have been baptized in

infancy on the other hand, must exercise a positively good influence upon the opening intelligence of childhood and youth. It would present a far stronger motive to piety to be made to feel that membership with Christ's church is a high privilege vouchsafed alone to those who design to serve and please God in Christ—suggesting, as soon as responsible intelligence was fully developed, and the manifestation of inherent corruption clearly evidenced (as it is evidenced in nearly all cases, notwithstanding a holy training), a feeling of danger while abstaining from personal repentance, obedience, and baptism.

But let the moral benefits of infant baptism both to parents and children be made out to their fullest extent, still we must think that the loss of baptism for young persons desirous of professing religious decision, and for those who present themselves for communion in maturer years, in the character of penitent sinners after a life of flagrant transgression, is an evil that far more than counterbalances all those benefits. The instances of those who have been sanctified from the birth, even under the advantages of Christian education, are not common. There are such cases, but they are far from numerous. Even for these, however, a distinct and personal profession of their adoption of the Christian faith when they reach the age of reason, by a solemn act like baptism, would be an admirable method of impressing upon their minds their obligations, and their relationship to the catholic church. But the immensely larger proportion of the children educated in religious families pass their childhood in vanity, and their youth in sin. This also, is all but universally the case with those whose misfortune it has been to be born in the unconsecrated houses of the ungodly. Nearly all who become seriously devout are conscious of some period of spiritual decision, a time of longer or shorter duration, when their

wills were first steadily devoted to God and the gospel. With most persons that is a time of painful, and sometimes of awful struggle, terror, and doubt. And none of those who know the power of the senses over the mind, will undervalue the merciful provision of Christ, which meets this early stage of spiritual anxiety, repentance, and faith, with a visible image of pardoning and purifying grace, a sign of God's boundless love to his lost child. The sound of "Arise, and wash away thy sins," is heavenly music to the penitent; and the total loss of such a sign through the practice of infant baptism seems to be an incalculable evil. The most solemn hours in mortal existence are those of baptism and resurrection. In the one we die to the law with all its woes, to the world with all its pomps and vanities, to sin with its works and wages. In the other, we shall ascend to the regions whither sin and death can never enter. The influence which the solemn administration of baptism (and it cannot be too solemn), to the young convert, or trained disciple, or returning profligate, must exercise upon their minds to the last hours of life, cannot fail to prove of the most salutary character. At the time of the celebration, it communicates (through an outward pledge, in which the administrator is the representative, or agent of God), *and is intended to communicate*, to the humble and believing recipient, a perfect peace through a sign of "the remission of sins." To him, coming up out of the water, heaven opens. On him the spirit of joy descends and dwells. And ever afterwards the remembrance of that solemn hour may console him in affliction, reclaim him in declension, and uphold him in temptation. If there are many who may approach the holy waters in the bond of iniquity like Simon Magus, with a formal profession, or a magical credulity,—or if there are many who may "forget" that they were "purged from their old sins," let no practical conclusion

be drawn to the prejudice of those whose Christian peace is comfortably supported, not only by "the answer of a good conscience" within, but externally by what Peter and Paul do not scruple to call in such cases, the "saving" waters of baptism. The divine ordinances will all be perverted by the superstitious and profane, but they are not the less the portion of those "honest and good hearts" who are the subjects of the Redeemer's dominion.

Those who have accustomed themselves to the baptism of young children, and in whose minds the rite is associated with all the purity and poetry of an enchanting age, will, doubtless, find it no easy task to bring their time-honoured habit to a period. It seems like tearing up the foundations of popular Christianity, to tear up infant baptism. The same feelings would arise in the mind of a member of the Greek church, discontinuing for the first time, his habit of presenting his child for the holy communion of the mass. But these infantile sacraments are at the foundation of corrupt Christianity, and therefore, the sooner they are discontinued, the better for the parent, for the child, and for the church of God.

4. It is not difficult to understand the origin of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration by the Holy Spirit. There is in the language of scripture, manifestly a customary connexion of baptism and regeneration; not that baptism is ever asserted to convey regenerating grace, but it is spoken of as the proper accompaniment of the "new creation." "He that believeth is born of God," or is regenerate. And "he that believeth is to be baptized." If baptism produced regeneration, it would be, "he that is baptized shall believe," for faith is the sign of regeneration: and baptism would convey the grace of faith. This connexion of thought and language, however, is outraged when applied to infants, who are incapable of any mental affection. Its application to them

was preceded by the adoption of an idea concerning the *nature of the ordinance*, which not only rendered it not irrational to baptize them, but made their baptism one of the first duties of the church. This idea was the notion that the sacrament conveyed grace as by a spiritual machinery—as by a divine magic. As soon as this notion got wind, the way was clear to infant regeneration; since, as Cyprian says, the child can oppose no obstacle to the grace of God. But the idea of the bestowment of the Holy Ghost at baptism was not altogether without foundation, and this assisted the delusion. It was usual in the apostolic age, for the Holy Ghost to descend as the wonder-working power, the author of tongues and miracles, upon the newly baptized. "Signs shall follow them that believe." Nothing was more natural than for an ignorant and carnal generation—such as were the multitude of the early Christians, to confound this descent of the Spirit as the wonder-working power, with his previous operation on the heart of the believer, as the revealer of Jesus Christ the regenerating power. Language used by the apostles exclusively with reference to the Holy Spirit in his wonder-working character, was applied with reference to the regenerating agency: and since it was usual for baptism to be accompanied by "the gift of the Holy Ghost," conferring tongues and curative powers, they come to imagine that baptism could confer regenerating grace. Whereas, the truth was, that the Holy Spirit must first have secretly operated on the soul to produce faith and regeneration, ere baptism would be generally desired, or the recipient could become a proper vessel for receiving the miraculous endowments of His second and more public bestowment. This confusion of the language of the apostles, respecting the sanctifying and the wonder-working energies of the Holy Spirit, has been the fruitful source of enthusiastic delusion and

priestly superstition in every age. In the second century it bred Montanism in the heated fanatics of Asia Minor —false pretences to inspiration, just when the holy gift was beginning to be taken away; and ever since it has appeared in manifold forms, as in Romanism, and in the Protestant sects which reject a settled ministry. The ordination services of the Church of England, not less than its baptismal and confirmatory rites, are redolent of the same error. Words, which in the mouths of apostles referred exclusively to the gift of the Spirit as the author of inspiration and miracles, came to be employed with reference to his sanctifying operations. His descent at baptism in the days of the apostles, was presumed to have been in his regenerating character. The delusion was speedily established. Every corrupt tendency in the churches fostered it. Baptism was very soon regarded not merely as the sign of God's mercy to the penitent believer, as the introduction into the visible church, but as the effectual means of conferring and infusing divine grace. What followed was logical and natural. Some postponed their baptism like Constantine to life's last hour, in order that the grace infused might not be injured or lost. Others proceeded to infant baptism, because, as the fathers of Carthage declared, it would be inhuman to deny them regenerating grace and to endanger their salvation in case of early decease. Perhaps one delusion was the fitting counterpart of the other. Had the infant baptism of the early ages been a mere dedication to God, after the manner of our modern nonconformist Protestants in England, the evil would not have been so glaring; but of such inefficacious infant baptism, those ages were totally ignorant. It was spiritual regeneration for all, or it was a nullity. Whatever ground the dissenting pædo-baptism may discover for itself in scripture, assuredly it has none in antiquity.

But although unable to perceive any scriptural or historical argument for the baptism of infants, I conceive that several expressions in the earlier Fathers may be taken to indicate that the baptism of pious children was practised in the apostolic age. And there seems no reason wherefore baptism should be denied to a person, however young, who requests it, when it is clear that the request is an intelligent, a personal, and a voluntary act. It is impossible to tell how early in some instances divine grace moves the childish spirit to faith and holy obedience. Each case must be considered by itself. But if Josiah was thought worthy of a kingly record and a divine approval at eight years of age, in consequence of his pious behaviour, it would appear to be warrantable, even at so early a period of life as this, in similar examples of godliness, to permit a personal and public adoption of the Christian name and character. Such instances probably would be found by sober judges not to be numerous, but when they occur baptism is to be allowed.

5. This leads, by a natural transition, to the consideration of the apostolic rule of baptism. It is manifest in the New Testament that the apostles and evangelists are represented as refusing baptism to none who professed repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. To all such it appears that they gave the sign of heavenly mercy without delay, thereby admitting them into the company of the saints, even to a Simon Magus, although he proved immediately to be still in the gall of bitterness. Peter's expression of surprise at the indication which he afforded of his impenitence and superstition, shows that it was the rule and the design to baptize *sincere* penitents and believers only, if possible; but, at the same time, the fact that he was baptized on the profession of faith, —"Simon believed also,"—is sufficient evidence that it

was not the custom to throw doubts upon the sincerity of the application of any man. A few self-deluded enthusiasts, like Ananias and Sapphira, might be carried into the church on the wings of excitement without conversion ; but in those days the danger that accompanied the profession of the hated religion of Christ, acted as an effectual safeguard against the admission of many hypocrites or impostors. The terror of vindictive miracles also guarded, as with a flaming sword, the gates of the sanctuary against improper applicants for baptism. "Of the rest durst no man join himself to them, though the people magnified them. But *believers in the Lord* were the more added, multitudes both of men and women," Acts v. 14. The apostolic provision, however, for the permanent purity of the churches was found in a prescription for the exercise of an internal discipline. They readily baptized and admitted all applicants, but they speedily "put away from amongst them" all "wicked persons." This known rigour of internal jurisdiction must have operated quite as forcibly to repel the approach of insincere persons, as the occasional dreadful execution of divine vengeance upon baptized criminals. Few would be found to solicit the society of a congregation where character would soon be ascertained, and, if discovered to be evil, most severely exposed and rebuked, except the honest converts to righteousness. Thus a ready admission by baptism was counterbalanced by a strict administration of ecclesiastical law. It may admit of question, whether, under the different circumstances of a national profession of Christianity, the apostles would have adhered to their rule. But it is clear that no danger can accrue to the purity of the church, so long as the discipline is maintained. If that be discontinued, and yet the ready baptism of all applicants be still permitted, nothing but disorder can ensue. Chris-

tianity is a living whole. We cannot remove one member of it without injuring the entire system, and even endangering its vitality.

In most of the dissenting churches a different method of admission to communion is adopted. The baptized child is informed by Dr. Wardlaw, that he was by baptism admitted only into the catholic church, not into the local church of which his parents were members; by Dr. Halley, that he was by baptism admitted into neither. Accordingly, when he reaches years of discretion, and turns to God, he is taught to seek for the privilege of "joining the church," and participating in the communion of the Lord's supper. But this cannot generally be permitted until he have given evidence, or what is to pass as evidence, of conversion. This is accomplished in various ways. Sometimes a written "experience" is handed in for the consideration of the church. Sometimes the pastor exercises his knowledge of human nature in forming an opinion upon the character of the applicant, and on his sole opinion the church proceeds. Sometimes one or two "deacons" receive a commission to visit the professed convert, and by conversation to elicit the evidence of true piety sought for on the occasion. The ordeal, of course, differs much in different places and with different men. With some deacons and visitors little enough passes as the proof of a change of heart. With others, silence is regarded as a deadly sign. Weak men are sometimes imposed upon by a fluent tongue; and stern formal officials are sometimes amazed, when the applicant from age, or peculiar constitution, or perhaps uncommon sense, is unwilling to disclose all the secrets of a troubled history. The modest virgin spirit, particularly in the upper ranks of society, is not seldom scared away from an avowal of faith by the dread of this official inquisition. The bold youth with good nerves, a ready

vocabulary, and a deceived heart, sometimes obtains an abundant entrance as the subject of a wonderful conversion.

The whole of this machinery seems to be an invention of modern times. The New Testament contains no laws for the visits of deacons, the judgment of pastors, or the delay in admission. A profession of repentance and faith was accepted by the apostles and evangelists as a sufficient title to baptism and communion. Had it indeed been known concerning any particular person, that, at the time of making this profession, he was living in the indulgence of sins which plainly indicated that he was in the "bond of iniquity;" sins which would have demanded his immediate separation from the sacred community had he been admitted within its precincts, we cannot doubt that baptism would have been refused to him, since "false brethren," or persecutors, such as Paul was thought to be by the church at Jerusalem, after his return from Damascus, were not knowingly to be "brought in." But where there were no outward and manifest signs in the character tending to reveal the insincerity of the applicant, it appears to be clear from the New Testament, that he was at once baptized, even although his "repentance" was self-deceptive, or transitory enthusiasm, or the superficial work of wonder or of terror. The burden of responsibility with respect to his real state before God, was left entirely upon his own shoulders. The apostles offered no opinion upon the genuineness of the conversion. That was to be tested by subsequent conduct, and if the "gall of bitterness" afterward appeared, excommunication was the remedy. The modern method of proceeding, while it carries a semblance of expediency in its bearing upon the preservation of the "purity of the church," in reality offers no guarantee whatever that such shall be the result. If the customary examinations

previous to admission effect the exclusion of some improper characters, they probably delude into a dangerous self-confidence many of those who pass successfully through the appointed trial. Trusting in the fact that they have undergone the judgment of their spiritual superiors, whose *opinion* of their safe state has been openly expressed before the church, it is ever afterwards exceedingly difficult to convince them that they must be converted ere they can enter the kingdom of God. Multitudes there are, the subjects of a brief excitement in early or later life, who in this manner obtain admission into our societies, whose subsequent conduct, if judged by the rule of scripture, evidently proves that they are not the disciples of the Redeemer. Yet it seems as though they considered that the original sanction of the church and of the ministry, given in favour of their regeneration, entitled them to hope against hope, and to press forward to the gates of death in confident security. A return to the apostolic rule would go far to prevent this dangerous delusion. Under any constitution, indeed, a margin must be left for self-deceivers in the churches, but it is quite needless to assist them in their mistaken courses. Let admission into the church be rendered more easy. Let the inquiries of the church be confined to external conduct. Let it be thoroughly understood by the applicant for communion, that the admission rests on his own profession of faith and repentance; that the church offers no opinion in favour of his absolute conversion to God, but leaves that matter to his own conscience before the Searcher of hearts. At the same time, let him be informed that he is about to enter into a society where his character will be severely tested, where insincerity will be speedily manifested, where sin will be encountered with "sharp rebuke," and where open vice will be punished with expulsion. A man's life and spirit during the few years following his

profession, is a far better test of the reality of his piety than all his conversation at the time of his reception into communion.

It is evident that such a method of proceeding would transfer the principal care in church government from the business of the admission of candidates for communion to the administration of internal discipline; and it is the spiritual and moral difficulty of exercising that discipline which has led to the contrivance of a difficult admission in order to avoid or forestall the dreaded necessity of a difficult expulsion. Under the prevalent system it is felt to be somewhat approaching to a reversal of a previous judgment of the church when a member is expelled; and this difficulty is more than doubled when the form of government is monarchical, particularly when that monarch is no other than a student of divinity fresh from his cell. Sectarianism produces small churches with single pastors. A spirit of unity would restore larger communities with a plurality of bishops. Under the present distress, perhaps, the evil might be partly remedied in such cases, if the spiritual executive were to be strengthened; if the officers should cease to be that which they often are, simply the richest men and secular functionaries, and were exchanged for the best men, the ablest, and the eldest. Let them become what the New Testament church officers were, ministers in the secular, and assistants in the spiritual, departments of God's temple. Let all cases of discipline be entered upon not in the name and authority of Him alone that labours in the word and doctrine, but in the name of the whole presbytery as the organs of the church; and if there be a prevailing spirit of piety, such a body will be irresistible. If there be not piety in a church sufficient to furnish such a body, and to maintain such a discipline, the case admits of no remedy. The New Testament furnishes

no directions for an ungodly society, but abandons it to its own corruptions and to its own damnation, in the everlasting destruction of hell.

Under no circumstances, however, are we to anticipate anything like perfection of purity in the churches militant. Allowances are to be made in the government of a Christian society, for the state of national civilization in relation to morals, and for individual knowledge and opportunities. The law of the church is not only the law of truth, but the law of love. It is the administration of a Father's house, not of a tyrant's dominion. Wisdom is ever gentle, hopeful, and patient. The apostle's rod wrought fewer repentances at Corinth than his arguments and his tears. An easier admission to the churches than that which commonly prevails amongst us, would make Pharisees indignant, and formalists miserable, but it would encourage the timid, and render the church what it ought to be in part, a school for babes in Christ; while it would oblige a return to that which is exceedingly to be desired, the exercise of a potent internal government.*

To this end it is, above all things, necessary to beseech Heaven for a mighty baptism of the Spirit of God. In the church and in the ministry of Jesus Christ "the flesh profiteth nothing." The Spirit of God is all in all. The prosperity of a church is to be reckoned not by its numbers, for numbers often betoken only the laxity of its doctrine and the decay of its discipline; not by the wealth or respectability of its members, for the rich are quite as frequently the curses as the blessings of a religious communion, and unless uncommonly endowed with grace, are at best but dangerous friends; not by the popularity of its public standing, for the bride of the

* On this subject, see Buyer's Letters on India, No. xvii.

Lamb must be "despised and rejected of men" until her Lord's return; but it is to be estimated by the signs of a divine presence in the midst, through which mighty deeds do show themselves for in its members; mighty deeds of self-denial, of practical benevolence, of heroic devotion to principle, of catholic Christian love. And of all the melancholy spectacles in this world, the most melancholy is that of a church and a ministry framed externally on the New Testament plan, but destitute inwardly of the Spirit of God. The raiment of camel's hair and the leathern girdle served well enough for the vestments of a body, of which the thunder-breathing spirit of John the Baptist was the soul. The roughly woven robe of the carpenter's Son was a sufficiently dignified array, since at the Transfiguration it became white as the light through the shining forth of the divinity within. Even so our simple and unadorned church polity, our unpretending and dependent ministry, will, if penetrated by the Spirit of the Eternal, form a vesture for truth as glorious as though it were a texture embroidered like the hangings of the tabernacle, with purple, and crimson, and gold. But if, by any possibility, our ministers were to become the mercenary flatterers of an unprincipled throng, the trained and slavish fuglemen of a theological party; if they should cease to be the men of God, seers and prophets raised up by Jehovah, experienced guides over the enchanted mountains to the heights of a blessed eternity;—if our societies should sink down from occupying the lofty position of branches of the catholic church, should come to think of themselves evermore only as a Protestant sect, busy for its traditions and superstitions, inflexible in its petty demands for conformity to unscriptural tests of ministry and of membership;—if the principal thing were to be nonconformity, and not Christianity, if our power were to be

felt chiefly as destroyers and not as creators, if the energy that streams forth from us were to manifest itself not in the spirit of meekness and temperance, in the humility of forgiven sinners, and the magnanimous carriage of those who hope ere long to be companions of the angels,—but in spite and jealousy, in taunts and sneers, in the spirit of half-resigned martyrs, who gnash their teeth at the degradation to which their faith has consigned them ;—if, in a word, we were ever to have nonconformist churches, and a nonconformist ministry devoid of a manifest alliance with Deity, why then, in the name of all grace and beauty, of all nobility and grandeur, let our churches and our ministry be dissolved. If we are to have the form without the power of godliness and honesty, let the form be, not that of a pretended infallible democracy, which is filled with ignorant and obstinate prejudices, which blindly tramples out every spark of theological inquiry unkindled at its own candlestick, which makes a clamorous profession of purity which it does not possess, and glories in a nakedness which has no beauty to recommend it to earth or heaven ; but let it be the form of the grand old religion, with its bishops and its palaces, its subordination and its pay, its ancestral traditions and storied literature, its stupendous cathedrals and long-drawn aisles of arched masonry, and windows stained with all the colours of the western sky, its ravishing music, its living sculpture, its sacred processions, and its songs of white-robed choirs : for these, if sometimes destitute of heavenly grace, at least are always beautiful ; and the outward form and comeliness of a corrupt religion are better than the defunct carcass of a good one.

May the Holy One of Israel fill our bishops and curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, with the spirit of counsel and might, with the spirit of

strong understanding in the fear of the Lord, with more of that spirit of love and moderation, which is the best guide to truth, in order that every godly reformation may be accomplished in the midst of us, and that our churches may prove themselves to be still the lights of the world.

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